

FIRST STEPS TO
FLY FISHING

MICHAEL TEMPLE

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FIRST STEPS TO FLY-FISHING

BY
MICHAEL TEMPLE

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FIRST STEPS TO FLY-FISHING

INTRODUCTORY

IN the strict sense of the term nobody can teach anybody else to become a fly-fisher. "Men are to be born so," and all the coaching in the world will do nothing for the pupil who has not the right temperament. Yet when I ask myself in what that temperament consists, I find it very hard to find any satisfactory answer. It certainly is not any love of killing for its own sake. If you are of the true breed you will have many days at the end of which you come home with an empty creel and yet be able to say quite honestly that you have had excellent sport.

To the man who really loves fly-fishing there is no sport in the world to compare with it. There is the unique attraction of pitting your wits against those of a creature for whose intelligence in his own

line of business you will very soon come to have a very wholesome respect. If you win in that contest, the victory is something to be proud of: if you lose, you can still admire without resentment the acuteness which foiled your utmost skill.

You are always fighting against difficulties, and their name is legion. Besides the sharp eyesight and the cunning of the trout, both of which are almost uncanny, every fresh cast is a fresh problem. Here it is a hawthorn behind: there a bed of weed in front. In another bit you must get your fly under a low-hanging branch: in a fourth there is a stone or a bunch of loose-strife which has obviously got where it is out of pure malignity. There is no end to your troubles, and it is just for that reason that the fascination never palls. You may get tired of everything else, but, take my word for it, once a fly-fisher, a fly-fisher you will be to the end of your days.

It is no sport for a fool. It demands, as no other does, the divine gift of imagination. If a man cannot put himself into the mind of the fish, he had best go to the fishmonger when he wants trout, for

he will do no good with the fly. Nor is it a sport for the man to whom the soul in Nature makes no appeal. Your true fly-fisher loves the streams and all that go with them for their own sake. To him there is exquisite delight alike in the translucent depths framed in the lush meadows of the lowland and the brawling rapids of the mountain beck, in the sound of many waters and in the tumble of the tiny cascade. For him the mead has been spangled with the cowslip and the orchis, and the air laden with the scent of the new-mown hay. For him the blackbird, that unparalleled artist, pours forth his joyous soul and the reed-warbler murmurs his tender little song of love.

Should he happen upon a rival in the person of an otter or a heron there is no anger in his heart, for are they not also brothers of the angle? To him the small exactions of the kingfisher seem but a paltry tax to pay for the enjoyment of that gem of living topaz and sapphire, and if the ouzel flits impudently over a rising trout 'tis but waiting a minute for the fish to understand that the bird meant him no harm.

Hearken to the words of Dame Juliana Berners, Prioress of Sopwell, in the first book on angling ever written in English :

“ Atte the leest he hath his holsom walke, and mery at his ease, a swete ayre of the swete savoure of the meede floures that makyth him hungry ; he hereth the melodyous armony of fowles, he seeth the younge swannes : heerons : chickes : and many other foules with theyr brodes, whyche me semyth better than alle the noyse of houndys : the blastes of hornys, and the scrye of foulis that hunters, fawkeners, and foulers can make. And if the angler take fysshe : surely thenne is there noo man merier than he is in his spyryte.”

If that be your “spyryte” you are three parts fly-fisher already, and all a veteran angler may pretend to do is to give you the help of his experience in the art in the hope of making smooth your path to mastery and saving you from some few stumbles on the way.

CHAPTER I

GENERAL EQUIPMENT

THERE is no need to fit yourself out with all the newest and most expensive gadgets, and I am going to try to keep your expenditure on tackle as low as I can. It is not necessary to have much, but what you have must be of the best. It is often possible to pick up wonderful bargains at auctioneers' sales, but, failing that, go to a tackle-maker with an established reputation and put yourself in his hands. If you can persuade an experienced friend to go with you, so much the better. But beware of cheap tackle. To your eye it may look no different from the work of the true craftsman, but it will most surely fail you in the hour of need.

Now, first as to the rod. If your purse will run to it, by all means get yourself one of those beautiful split-canes with a steel centre. They are delightful to handle, they save a great deal of fatigue, and

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they are wonderfully powerful. But they are very delicate, they cost a good deal of money, and, if you should happen to have a breakage, they are quite beyond any amateur repairs.

It will be better, I think, for you to be content, at any rate at first, with a good, sound bit of hickory which you can splice for yourself when you have put your foot into a rabbit hole and broken the middle joint and expert assistance is a hundred miles away. Take care that it is not too heavy for you to use with comfort and that it feels light in the hand. When the reel is on it should balance at a point not more than a few inches above the grip, and the closer that point is to the grip the more comfortable the rod will feel.

Ten feet is quite long enough for all practical purposes, and it is better that the rod should err on the stiff than on the whippy side. I do not agree with that great fisherman, the late Mr. Stewart, that a fly-rod should be stiffer than any other, and I fancy that, when he said so, he was only emphasising his objection to an excessive pliability. If, when a ten-foot rod is held horizontally, the point drops

from three to three and a half inches, it is just about right. When in use it should bend evenly from butt to point: there must be no "floppiness" about it anywhere. I prefer the fixed snake-rings and, if the rod is fitted with locked joints, so much the better.

With such a rod you can do anything in reason, and it is odds on your growing so fond of it that you will never discard it in favour of the more luxurious split-cane. There is one such rod beside me as I write which has been my friend and companion for forty years and has never failed me yet. It is as good to-day as when it left the maker's hands, and I would not change it for a wilderness of split-canes.

For the reel there is nothing better than one made of gun-metal with two handles set flush in the face, so that there is nothing to catch the line at critical moments. It should be large enough to hold at least thirty yards of line comfortably, and be fitted with a check just strong enough to prevent the line from over-running when a cast is made.

Lines are made of all sorts of materials, but if you will take my advice you will

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have one of silk, plaited and as heavily dressed as it will bear. No other line that I have ever used is so easy to throw, especially against the wind, but you must be careful to dry it when you have finished for the day, for, though a good dressing will do much to make the silk waterproof, such a line is liable to rot if you habitually put it away damp. It is most important that the weight of the line should be adjusted to the rod with which it is intended to be used. If it is too light for the particular rod, good casting is almost impossible : if it is too heavy, it will strain the rod and wear it out in a surprisingly short time. For this adjustment I can give you no rules, but any good tackle-maker will see that you have a line suited to your rod. It is quite unnecessary to have the line tapered : all the tapering that is required can be provided in the gut cast.

Of casts you will need at least a dozen. They should be three yards in length, and they must be carefully tapered from the stout gut which is attached to the line to the almost invisible thread which holds the tail fly. To ensure this tapering I usually make my own, buying the strands of gut

of different thicknesses and putting them together to suit my own fancy, which favours a rather more exaggerated tapering than you can usually obtain in casts bought ready-made. They may be either of silkworm gut or of the new, or comparatively new, transparent silk. The latter have the advantage that you can cut your strands to any length you wish, so as to have very few knots on the cast, and you can have it as fine as you can possibly desire. Somehow, however, I do not think it is quite so strong in proportion as the old gut, and perishes more quickly. But this may be merely a fad of my own, and certainly it is very beautiful stuff.

Some people, especially in the North, still swear by the hair cast. It gives a very clean, straight throw, and it is admirable when you have to cast against the wind. But good hair is very difficult to get and it is never so fine as the finest gut. Also this very stiffness which is its chief advantage is in another way against it. Unless you are particularly skilful you will be for ever popping off your flies, which is an irritating, not to say expensive, process. So, though I have used hair a good deal in

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my time and quite recognise the value of a course of fishing with it for teaching lightness of hand, I do not recommend it.

The "butt-end" of your cast will have a loop whereby to attach it to the line, and this is the only loop which you are permitted on any part of your tackle. The line itself should terminate in a small and very neat knot, tied as tightly as you can manage, and with no more than the barest suspicion of an end to it. Fasten the cast to the line by the knot which sailors call, I think, the "bowline." Anyhow, whatever its proper name, it is very simple and perfectly trustworthy. To make it: run the line, with the knot at the end of it, through the loop upwards; then turn the line downwards and away from you over the cast, bring it up again on the other side and towards you, slip it under itself, and draw all taut. When you want to take the cast off, snip off the little knot on the line and it will come away at once. The amount of line you will lose in this way will be negligible, and you will avoid the fraying of the gut loop which is almost inevitable if you try to undo the fastening with your fingers.

You will need something in which to carry your fish and your tackle, and nothing is better than the ordinary creel of basket-work. Avoid all bags, haversacks, and waterproof abominations. They spoil the appearance of your dish of trout, and it is an everlasting trouble to keep them clean. Put some hay in the bottom of your basket to prevent the contents from jostling. It will keep sweet and clean for years. A landing-net is an indispensable addition to your equipment.

Also put a "priest" in your pocket for the administration of the last rites. This sort of priest is a miniature truncheon with a bit of lead let into the top, and a tap with it just behind the head will kill your fish instantly. Always carry one with you, first, because it is barbarous to leave the unhappy trout to expire in long agonies of suffocation, and secondly, because if you leave the fish to drown in the air or kill them in any other way, they are apt to die with their mouths open and present a gruesome spectacle.

I am afraid that you must have waders. As to the sort, you may suit yourself and your purse: all that really matters is that

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they should keep out the water. But waders of some sort are a necessity, for without them you cannot, on many streams, get properly and inconspicuously at your fish at all. If you elect for the waterproof fishing-stockings with a pair of brogues to be worn over them, put very coarsely knitted socks between the feet of the stockings and the shoes. Otherwise intrusive gravel will speedily wear holes in the waterproof, and the tiniest puncture is quite enough to give you a most efficient soaking.

When wading go slowly and disturb the water as little as you can. Probably fish have no such sense of hearing as ours, but they are intensely sensitive to vibrations in the water and to disturbances on the surface. The angler who goes walloping about in a still reach, sending waves in front of him, will infallibly put down every rising fish. If by accident you do make any disturbance of the kind, keep quiet until it has subsided, and the trout will conclude that the bother was caused by some clumsy but harmless cow and begin to feed again.

As to whether you should have a fly-

book or a fly-box—well, please yourself. Fly-boxes are all the fashion now, but I still prefer, speaking personally, a leather fly-book with plenty of pockets for spare casts and the like, and places for a fine pair of scissors, nippers, a small disgorging needle, and so forth. Mine is of alternate leaves of felt and parchment. In the felt I stick the flies and on the parchment I write any notes referring to them which seem worth remembering. People say that it spoils the “set” of the flies to keep them in this way, but I have never found it so myself, and the book allows you to have everything to your hand at once, which the box does not. I keep one felt page at the end for flies which I wish to put away damp. The felt dries them well enough, and they do not injure the others in the process.

Whether you prefer a book or a box, take every precaution to keep the moths away. There is nothing more maddening than to find that the moths have got at your flies when your back was turned, and the brutes always seem to choose one's special pets for their depredations. Also, while we are on the subject of precautions, never try to tie knots on gut that has not

been previously well soaked, or it will fray badly, if not actually break; and never leave it exposed to the sunlight longer than is necessary. Even persistent damp does not rot silkworm gut so effectively as does light. When a cast is no longer in use it should be put away in some place that is both dark and dry.

You will think I am never going to be done with my gadgets, but if you will suffer me to recommend just one more I promise you it shall be the last. There is a most useful little arrangement consisting of a rather heavy ring which can be opened so as to place it round your rod. To this is attached a length of fine but strong cord, and the object of the whole contraption is to save you from a bad break when you get into difficulties—as you certainly will. Suppose you get your fly fixed in a nice, tough hawthorn, or one of the utterly unbreakable stems of the water fig-wort. When you do, it generally happens that, owing to the depth of the water, or the height of the banks, or something or other, there is no getting at the blessed thing. Here the clearing-ring will save you. Slip it on the rod and let it slide down the line

until it reaches the point at which you have got stuck. Then pull on the cord. If you are lucky you will bring the detainer away: if you are not, you will at least lose no more than the fly instead of half your cast as well. It is a simple little contrivance, costing very little, and taking up hardly any room, but it is most efficient and will save you many a breakage. Besides, the mere knowledge that you have it in your pocket will give you confidence in casting into the near neighbourhood of danger.

CHAPTER II

FLIES

WE come now to the flies themselves, the imitations by which we hope to deceive the fish. Their name is legion, and unfortunately almost every well-known variety has several names of its own according to the locality, while the dressings prescribed by the experts are even more numerous than the names. The entomology of fly-fishing is an intricate if attractive science, and though I hope to be able to simplify it for you to a considerable extent, you are not to suppose that you can safely dispense with all knowledge of the subject.

It may be true, within certain limits, that the strand of gut on which the fly is tied is of more importance than the fly itself, but that does not in the least interfere with the fact that the trout will not look at the imitation of a fly which has not yet come on the water, or that when some

specially favoured fly is "up" it is practically hopeless to offer them an imitation of any other.

In what I may perhaps venture to call the Dark Ages people tried to get over the difficulty by offering the fish a wide range of choice. A cast of a dozen flies, or even more, was quite commonly employed, and an extraordinarily clumsy thing it must have been. Then, as the trout grew more wary and finer fishing became necessary, the number was reduced to three, and to that a very large number of those who fish with the wet fly still adhere.

But it was always noticed that the tail fly accounted for at least twice as many fish as either of the "droppers," as they were called, and of late a new school has grown up which advocates the use of a single fly only, even when one is fishing "wet," that is, allowing the fly to sink below the surface. For "dry" fly-fishing the single fly has always been employed, since it is practically impossible to keep more than one fly afloat on the surface.

I am so convinced that this new school has the best of the argument that I am not going to trouble you with any directions for

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attaching "droppers" to your cast. Find the fly which is the right one for the time being and use that alone. With one fly your casting will be incomparably neater than with three. You will get into far fewer difficulties, and if you get into a good fish he will have much less chance of hanging you up on a snag and breaking away.

Some time ago a friend of mine was fishing in the company of a very good fisherman indeed, who was wedded to the three-fly system, whereas my friend was of the new school. Both fished "wet," as indeed the nature of the stream obliged them to do. At the end of the day the single-fly man had nine fine fish, and the three-fly man three—a result which instantly and permanently converted him. Therefore, if you please, we will confine ourselves to one fly at a time, and, if we use a little observation and common sense, we shall not find it so difficult to discover which sort it ought to be.

But, before we consider the stocking of your fly-book, there are just two points which we must settle. Are we to have flies tied on gut or are we to have eyed flies,

and, if the latter, how can we best attach them to the cast? Eyed flies, by all means. With the eyed fly you can have your gut as strong or as fine as you please, and, let me tell you, in any place in which you cannot procure eyed flies it is very unlikely that you will be able to get the other sort tied on gut which is sufficiently fine for use in clear water.

For the attachment of the eyed fly to the cast, a thing which must be done with the utmost neatness, there are two methods in common use, and I don't think it matters much which you employ. The first is the bowline knot which was described when we were considering how to fasten the cast to the line, only with this difference, that now the eye of the fly takes the place of the loop on the cast. For the second, you push a loop at the end of your cast through the eye and draw it gently over the fly, taking particular care not to disturb the set of the wings and hackles. Then above the eye with the loose end of the loop you make an ordinary slip-knot on the cast and draw the loop tight, so that the slip-knot is jammed against the eye and the loop has become no more than a turn of the gut on

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the shank immediately above the eye. Whichever method you adopt you must snip off the protruding end of gut as closely as you dare without endangering the security of the arrangement.

On streams or lakes whose trout are very little fished for, almost any of the "fancy" flies will do well enough at times. That is, I think, because a great many of them bear a rough, general resemblance to the natural insect while others are tempting from their very strangeness and are taken, at any rate by lake trout, for the same mysterious reason which induces a salmon to rise at contraptions which are like nothing in the heavens above or in the earth beneath or in the waters under the earth.

But I have never found the local "fail-me-never" a whit better, even on such unfished waters as are now rare indeed in this country, than an imitation of the fly that is, or lately has been, on the water; while on streams whose trout are educated and critical the "fancy" flies are for the most part worse than useless. Almost the only exception I would make is the deadly Alexandra, but then the fish do not mistake it for a fly at all, but for a minnow, and in

many places its use is not considered legitimate. I do not regard it as unfair myself, and have no scruples about using it for fishing in the early autumn, when it is most effective, except, of course, on waters where it is specially prohibited. But with this exception and that of the Coachman, which is excellent after dusk, being no doubt taken for one of the many white-winged moths which come out at that time, I eschew "fancy" flies altogether. It may be tiresome to study the entomology of the water, but it stands to reason that, if the trout takes the artificial fly in mistake for the natural insect, the closer you can get to Nature, the more successful you will be.

The Entomology of Fly-fishing is a science in itself, and it is more than likely that in your progress from Entered Apprentice to Master Craftsman you will become fascinated by it. Fortunately, however, it is not at all necessary to acquire any profound knowledge of the subject at the outset or to lay in a stock of the multitudinous varieties which appear from time to time on the water. What it really imports you to know and to have is a much simpler thing than that. There are certain,

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comparatively few, varieties which because of their abundance are always in the recollection of the fish. These you must have : you must be able to recognise the natural insects when you see them on the water ; and you must know the time of year at which their appearance is to be expected.

With a comparatively small stock of flies you may not, perhaps, have an imitation of the insect at which the fish are rising at the moment. Never mind. Out of the list I propose to give you, it is certain you will be able to pick one at which they were rising an hour or two ago, and will be rising again an hour or two hence. There are indeed times when they will not look at anything except the one fly which is on for the moment. Well, if that is so, you cannot help it, but as a general rule they will not disdain that other whose flavour they have learned to appreciate, and whose appearance at the moment in question does not strike them as suspicious.

In order to simplify the matter as much as possible, I will only give a list of the flies which are indispensable. But please understand that these really *are* indispensable. They will all kill, more or less, at

their respective seasons, whether they are on the water or not, and, when they are on, the fish, in nine cases out of ten, will take nothing else. Let me, however, add one cautionary note to my list. Certain waters have their own peculiarities in the matter of flies, and here and there you will come across a stream which specialises, so to speak, in the production of some insect which is not included here. Only local knowledge can help you in these cases, which, happily, are not very common, and such knowledge is easily acquired on the spot.

NO. I : THE BLUE DUN

There are only two objections I know of to this capital fly. One is that it varies a good deal in shade, chiefly, I think, owing to differences of temperature when it is hatched, so that it is wise to have at least two dressings, one light and the other of a dark tint approaching almost to an olive. The other is that it rejoices in a most confusing multiplicity of names. In many places it is called the Hare's Ear ; in Devonshire the Blue Upright ; in Yorkshire the Water-hen Bloa ; in North Lancashire and

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Cumberland the Blue Bloa and Olive Bloa, according to the shade: in fact, there is no end to the local names. But that need not trouble you, because the tackle-maker will know well enough what you mean by "Blue Dun." The fly makes its appearance in March. When the spring weather is genial the lighter—which is the more usual variety—will be found most abundant, and when it is bleak the darker. In one of the two forms it may be used up to the end of May, and occasional hatches, for which it is well to look out, occur from time to time all through the season.

NO. II: THE MARCH BROWN

Taking it all round, there is no better fly than this. Except in a very genial season it will rarely, despite its name, be found on the water before the beginning of April, but, once it is on, it is a case of *J'y suis, j'y reste*, for it lasts until the coming of the May Fly, and in the late summer produces another hatch which, perversely enough, is called the August Dun, but is then rather smaller, so you will do well to have the fly in two sizes. Its

metamorphosis is the Red Spinner, which is abundant enough when the March Browns begin to shed their skins after the first stage in their winged life is over, but I do not consider it indispensable. The trout much prefer the March Brown and see nothing odd in the appearance among a lot of Red Spinners of a March Brown who has not yet changed his coat. Let me add that if you cannot kill fish with the March Brown when the March Brown is "up," there is no fly that will ever be any good to you at all.

NO. III : THE YELLOW DUN

This fly, which in the North has the name of the Yellow-legged Bloat, is, I fancy, only another variety of the Blue Dun. But it is so different in colour as to be, from the fisherman's point of view, entirely separate. On most waters you will not find it until April is well advanced, but, after the first arrival, when it is very abundant, it makes sporadic appearances throughout the season and is almost always greatly favoured by the trout. It is always well to keep one's eyes open for a rise of the Yellow Dun.

NO. IV : THE BLACK SPIDER

Whether this fly is an imitation of any one specific insect, and if so of which, I am not sure. I rather fancy its value consists in its general resemblance to a good many small black flies—including that horrid little nuisance, the Black Gnat—some of which are almost always on the water. But, whatever the explanation, there is no doubt about its usefulness, especially in clear water, and when there is no marked rise of anything else. The best pattern is that recommended by the late Mr. Stewart, who advised that it should be dressed “hackle-wise,” that is, without wings, with the feather of a cock-starling, and a body of brown silk. You can hardly have it too small in size.

NO. V : THE IRON-BLUE DUN

This, which is identical with the Little Dark Watchet of the North, generally makes its first appearance during some sudden gleam of sunshine as April merges into May. It has a short season, but the fish have a great fancy for it while it lasts,

and it is almost hopeless to try anything else when the Iron Blue is "up." Its metamorphosis, the Spinning Jenny, would, I have no doubt, be equally killing if we could imitate it satisfactorily. So far, however, this has never been done, but as both forms of the insect are commonly on the water at the same time, we can be content to make the Iron Blue serve our turn. You may not want the Iron Blue for more than a week in the season, but when you do want it, you want it very badly indeed. You may expect a rise of it at any time from the end of April to the beginning of June.

NO. VI: THE ALDER

From the middle of May to the end of June the Alder is abundant on most streams, and it is of great use, especially towards evening, on days when the May Fly does not compete with it. Being a decidedly stout insect, the imitation should be dressed with a much fuller body than is desirable in the case of the more delicate duns and spinners. The Alder has the advantage of being an easy fly to imitate, and the trout are extraordinarily fond of it.

No. VII: THE LITTLE BLUE

This is identical with the Dotterel of the North, where it is very famous, being good not only of itself, but as a passable imitation of many small flies that come on from time to time. You cannot do without it, for when the fish are rising at the Little Blue it is very hard to persuade them to attend to anything else. This and the Alder will be your standard flies for the interval—roughly the month of May—between the March Brown and the May Fly.

No. VIII: THE MAY FLY

Like all the Ephemeridæ, the May Fly has two forms, the *pseud-imago*, known as the Green Drake, and the *imago*, or perfect insect, known as the Gray Drake or Spent Gnat. Space will not allow me to discuss here the amazing life-history of these exquisite insects, and I only hint at it because as you become more and more interested in fly-fishing you are sure to wander down some of these by-paths, and this is one of the most fascinating. I do not think you need stock the Gray Drake. It is useful at times, but it is rarely indis-

pensable, and as a rule the Green Drake will serve your turn well enough. On most waters the great rise of the fly is during the first two weeks in June, when it provides what is rather unkindly known as "the Duffer's Fortnight," for the trout are greedy after it beyond all belief. It is not an easy fly to imitate, and though there are hundreds of patterns, none is absolutely perfect. I will not venture to dogmatise further than to say that, whatever pattern your tackle-maker recommends, be sure to get one which floats. With other flies I fish "wet" whenever, or rather wherever, I can, but the May Fly must be fished "dry," and therefore you need a pattern which does not get soaked at every second throw. You must, I am afraid, have two varieties, one in which the green, and the other in which the yellow, tinge predominates. The colours vary very much in different waters, and a cunning old trout of years and discretion has a most acutely developed colour sense.

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No. IX : THE COCH-Y-BONDDHU

This is really a small sort of cockchafer, and, though it is only actually on the

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water for about a fortnight in June, it is a capital fly all through the season after the May Fly has disappeared. It has many names, but as the Welsh one is now universally known, probably because the fly is such a great favourite on the Welsh streams, I need not trouble you with them.

NOS. X AND XI: THE RED AND BLACK ANTS

In July the winged ants come in thousands on to the water, and are greedily taken by the fish. Generally speaking, you do not get both on the same stream, so, if you can discover which of the two affects the stream you fish, you can do without the other. Otherwise you must be prepared for either. Both the Blue Dun and the Iron-blue Dun come on again in this month, and it is well to be on the lookout for them. The July hatches are slightly lighter in colour than those of the spring.

NO. XII: THE SILVERHORN

I have a great fancy for this fly and consider it quite the best stand-by for July

and August. It is always dressed with the "horns," i.e. the rather prominent speckled antennæ, attached, and so dressed looks very pretty in the shop. Pull the horns out when you come to the water. I doubt if the fish notice them at all, and, when the fly becomes wet, they fold back against the wings and disfigure them in a way that the fish *do* notice. With August there comes another hatch of the March Brown. It is now called the August Dun, but though it is a little smaller than the March Brown I am sure it is the same fly. At any rate your March Browns will always kill when the August Duns are on.

NO. XIII : THE CINNAMON

This is also an August fly and is very deadly when it appears. It can be used all through August and September, and is particularly good in the late afternoon and the early evening. With this, the Silverhorn, the March Brown, and the Blue Dun, you will have choice enough for September.

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NO. XIV : THE WHITE MOTH

The time for using this fly is at dusk and after on a summer evening. As it is a very conspicuous object you can hardly fail to see when it is on, and then you cannot do without it.

NO. XV : THE COACHMAN

This is another great favourite of mine for evening and night fishing. What the trout take it for I do not know, for there is nothing which it exactly resembles. But take it they do, possibly, as the late Mr. Francis Francis suggested, because in the dusk the contrast between the dark body and the white wings enables them easily to perceive it.

There are hundreds of other flies, all of which will kill well at certain times and in certain places. But the list given above will suffice as a basis for the young angler. As he grows in mastery of his fascinating art he will certainly add to it, and it will be strange if he does not form special fancies for flies which I have not

even mentioned. We all come to have pet flies of our own, and one need not be a disciple of Dr. Coué to recognise that the fly in which we have come fervently to believe is a very good fly for us. The list here given covers only those which are really indispensable. It does not pretend to be complete, still less to be exclusive.

CHAPTER III

HOW TO FISH

THE first thing to learn is how to throw a fly, and you will save yourself a great deal of trouble and disappointment if you acquire the art before, and not after, you go on your first campaign against the trout.

Have you a lawn, tennis or otherwise? Capital! Any bit of grass which will give you a length of sixty feet or so is all that is wanted. Get an egg or something about the same size and equally conspicuous, and put it at one end of it. Then begin by standing about twice the length of your rod, say twenty feet, from the egg, and try to throw as near to it as you can. We will come to a cast with a fly at the end of it all in good time. All that is wanted at the beginning is the bare line.

At first you will probably find your line uncommonly hard to manage, to say nothing of hitting the egg with the end of

it. But you will very soon discover the first part of the secret, which is to give plenty of time for the line to straighten itself out behind you. Whenever you hear it make any sound, no matter how faint, like the cracking of a whip, you know that you have made your return too quickly. If you were to do so when it was fitted with a cast and a fly, the chances are that you would pop the fly off altogether, and it is hardly necessary to say that there are more profitable ways of spending one's time than in offering to the trout casts with no flies on them.

To get the line out smoothly you will find that there is also something else required besides avoiding this "popping," by giving what will at first seem to you quite an inordinate length of time behind. We will suppose you have got some line out somehow in the direction of the egg, and the point is how to get it back again for another throw.

Don't try yourself too high at first. Be content for the first three or four throws with a line only a little longer than the length of your rod. Casting, remember, is almost entirely wrist work, and your wrist

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requires to be educated to the task. Well now, we have got our line fairly straight out in front of us, what are we to do next? With a turn of the wrist we bring it back so that it comes over our right shoulder between the raised forearm and the face, and then, being always careful to give lots of time for it to uncoil to its fullest extent behind us, we urge it forward, but this time making it come past the right of the forearm and the rod. At first we shall certainly hit ourselves in the face with it when coming back and, with almost equal certainty, tangle it up round the rod in coming forward. But that painful phase will not last for more than the first quarter of an hour.

After that, or sooner, we shall find the line coming neatly and smoothly over our shoulder when it is travelling in the one direction, and not touching the rod when it is proceeding in the other. Having reached this stage we shall then reverse the motion, bringing the line back on the outside and forward on the inside. The idea of the thing is to make the line describe a figure rather like a hairpin, and when you come to the water you will find that it is not

only desirable but really necessary to be able to do it both ways.

You can manage it all right now, can you? I thought you would, for it is really very easy. Now with each succeeding throw we will let out a little more line until we have enough to reach the egg, which is sitting looking at us twenty feet away. Before we go any further we must be able to hit that egg at least once in every three shots, and never miss it by more than an inch or two. And we must be able to do it in every sort of wind, barring a real gale. We shall begin with the wind behind us, since that gives us much the easiest throw; then we shall go on to casting across the wind; and finally to casting directly against the wind, which is a much easier thing to do than you supposed when first you took the rod in hand.

Presently we shall find that we can throw, at any rate, into the near neighbourhood of the egg with almost perfect certainty, and that is a great step gained. The next is, I admit, a little more difficult; we have got not only to hit the egg, but to make the line do so "as gently," to quote a famous prescription, "as a roseleaf

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falling on a lady's veil." That is not easy, until you grasp the knack of it, and then it is simple enough. Instead of aiming directly at the egg, we aim at a point in the air about two feet above it, and when the line is fully extended in the direction of this point, we check its motion with the wrist and let it fall upon the egg. Observe most particularly that no portion of the line must touch the ground before the end of it is, as it were, hovering over the egg.

You have learned in the course of an hour or so's practice how to do this, and now you are naturally eager to have a go with a cast on your line and a fly at the end of it. Wait just a little longer. By the waterside things do not arrange themselves quite so conveniently as on a shaven lawn. There are trees and bushes and aggravating clumps of weed. In any ordinary garden it is quite easy to imitate most of these difficulties by the simple process of moving the egg into various awkward places. You have learned the beginnings of the management of the line. Go on until you discover—as you must do for yourself, and can only do by practice—how the further difficulties are to be over-

come before you attempt anything with the actual fly. If you go at the thing steadily and thoroughly, your rod, in quite a surprisingly short time, will feel as though it were just an extension of your right hand, and when that feeling comes to you, you have gone a very long way on the right road.

Now you shall fit your line with a cast with a fly on it and go to work after that egg in earnest. You will find it a good deal more difficult than with the bare line, but do not be discouraged. The same principles will carry you through, for all that you now need to acquire is lightness of hand. When, through the garden practice, you feel that you can manage twenty feet of line and cast, you are quite ready for the waterside, and I promise you that when you get there you will have no reason to fear the criticism of brother anglers or those more pointed ones with which the trout confound the inexperienced.

When you get to the waterside, your first object must be to keep as much as possible out of the sight of the trout. Therefore wade whenever and wherever you can. A man standing on the bank is

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clearly visible to every fish within twenty yards of him, whereas a man who is wading will hardly be seen at twenty feet. This is of course in clear water : when the stream is coming down the colour of brown stout it does not matter, for the fish then can no more see you than you can see them. But in these days with the modern system of draining, the streams clear very quickly, and we cannot afford to restrict our fishing to the periods when the water is coloured.

If you wade you can kill fish when the water is as clear as gin, and when those who are fishing from the bank cannot get a rise. Bright sunshine and clear water are not ideal conditions, but they are very far from hopeless for the angler who wades. On such days you will very often see the fish feeding greedily, and you need never despair of getting a decent basket if only you take care to keep out of their sight.

Always fish up-stream, i.e. cast against the flow of the water, not with it, and let it bring your fly towards you, not away from you. The fish invariably lie with their heads pointing up-stream, and, fortunately for us, even the sharpest-eyed trout is not furnished with eyes in his tail.

Don't wait for the fly to be carried nearer to you than the point at which you can whisk it neatly off the water, or you are almost sure to get into some sort of difficulty. Let it travel a short distance and then take another cast, while you can do so comfortably without having to shorten your line. Far and away the most deadly moment is that at which the fly first falls upon the water, and you can hardly repeat it too often.

If a fish rises in front of you, don't throw directly into the circle he has made on the surface of the water. If you do, he is almost certain to detect the casting-line, and the sight of it will alarm him. Cast above him and a little to the side. He will see your fly and he will not see your line. Should he rise and refuse, give him a minute and then come over him again with the same fly, unless you see that there is a rise of something else, in which case change to it. In either case leave him if he refuses a second time. You can bully a grayling into taking by repeated throws, but that policy is of no use with a trout. The trout who has twice risen to you and twice refused, has made up his mind that

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there is something suspicious about the affair, and it is useless to waste any more time on him.

When you get a rise, strike like a flash of lightning—only quicker. The slightest turn of the wrist is enough, but it must be made instantly. The moment the fish gets your fly in his mouth he knows that he has made a mistake and, unless he has contrived to hook himself, he will eject it if you give him half a chance of doing so. The art of quick striking is one which can only be acquired by practice, and some people never succeed in mastering it at all. The chief thing in it is to be constantly on the alert. If you find your attention wandering because, perhaps, the fish have not been rising very well for the last half-hour or so, stop fishing and go and sit on the bank until you get really keen again. Otherwise you will simply disturb the water for others and do no good for yourself.

When you have hooked your fish, get on terms with him as quickly as you can. Hold him as tightly as the strength of your tackle will bear, and give him no more line than you must. If he is a good fish he will give you plenty of trouble anyhow,

and you may be sure he knows the whereabouts of every snag in his territory, and will do his best to make use of it. Against a tight line he cannot do very much, but with a loose one he is almost sure to get you into some sort of tangle and break you. If he holds on to a sedge with his jaws, as they sometimes will, keep up a steady strain and he must let go in the end. If he leaps out of the water in the attempt to break your line by falling across it, drop your rod point and you will foil his manoeuvre.

Get him below you as soon as you can, first, because you do not want him to disturb the water above you, and, secondly, because when he is below you, you have the power of the stream to help you in fighting him and can deal with him much more easily. When he is exhausted, which will be seen by his turning on his side, steer him into a quiet bit of water and get the landing-net under him as unostentatiously as you can. Even at this moment beware of a final rush. A good trout is never caught until he is actually in the net and the net is out of the water.

Then knock him mercifully on the head

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and waste no time in admiring him, great though his beauty is. The rise, which may be the only rise of the day, has begun and, if you mean to fill your basket, you must take opportunity by the short hairs. In nothing is it truer than in trout-fishing that, as the ancient saying goes, "opportunity is bald behind."

On the vexed question of "dry" or "wet," wisdom prescribes an open mind. The dry-fly men scoff at the wet practitioners as the "Chuck-it-and-chance-it brigade": the wet-fly men call dry-fly work "finicking," and jeer at its professors. The truth is they are both right and both wrong, and it is a mistake to pin one's faith exclusively to either theory. On some of the well-fished Southern rivers, whose waters are deep but clear, and whose trout run large, there is usually very little to be done with the wet fly, though it is true that every now and then some skillful exponent of that theory succeeds in astonishing the natives. On the other hand, in the swift and comparatively shallow streams of the hill country the wet fly will have the dry beaten every time.

Learn to use both methods and select

the one favoured in the particular water you are fishing. If you are to occupy your business almost exclusively in the chalk streams, have your flies dressed as floaters, and keep them on the surface of the water. If you wander at all try the wet fly first, and if that will not do, make it into a dry fly by anointing it with a few drops of the odourless paraffin which is sold in the tackle shops. You will find it quite effectual, though the use of it is a bit of a bother.

But the great rule in this, as in everything else connected with fly-fishing, is to keep your eyes on what is happening and adjust your proceedings accordingly. The fish take the dry fly for the flies which come jauntily down sitting on the water, and the wet for those which are just hatched and are struggling to reach the surface. They feed greedily upon both. In bright sunshine and clear water the flies are on the surface in hundreds, and therefore yours should mimic their behaviour. In unsettled weather great numbers never manage to emerge for their first flight, and are taken by the trout as they are struggling upward. In troubled waters their struggle

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is further handicapped by the currents and eddies, and the trout get accustomed to catching them on the hop, so to speak. Therefore in such conditions the wet fly pays best.

In the main, the dry-fly streams are clear, deep, and slow, and the wet-fly swift and dashing, with their waters varying in colour almost from hour to hour as they are affected by the rains in the hills. But if you keep your eyes open to the weather and the state of the water you will notice plenty of occasions in which the wet fly can be used more successfully than the dry in a dry-fly stream, and plenty more when the dry will beat the wet in streams to which, in usual circumstances, the wet fly is better adapted.

Each method has its own peculiarities. The dry-fly man marks down a rising fish and proceeds to lay siege to it. The wet-fly man does not concern himself with individuals, but studies the water and casts where, as he has learned by experience, the trout are certain to lie. In dry-fly fishing you will rarely do any good except when the fish are rising: in wet-fly fishing you may often make a good basket

when almost the only rises you see are those at your own fly. That is because the trout are taking the flies below the surface and therefore your object will be to let your fly sink as much as possible, and to give it the appearance of an insect struggling through the water to the air above.

CHAPTER IV

WHERE TO FISH

BEYOND saying that the novice will do best to begin on the wet-fly streams, for which he will look in hilly country, and that he had better try to find one—if he can—whose trout are tolerably unsophisticated, which means in practice as far from London as possible, I am not going to indicate any particular localities. Also if he should happen to light upon one of those paradises in which the trout have not yet eaten of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, I strongly advise him to keep the fact to himself. Years ago I found one and, like a fool, must needs babble and even write about it. Result: it is now harder work to take a brace in that water than it used to be to take a dozen.

So, if you please, we will name no names, but confine ourselves to principles. Now, really, the first and the last of these is to

get into the mind of the trout. I will go even further and say that the capacity or the incapacity to do this makes the difference between good and bad in every department of fly-fishing. The man destitute of imagination might as well try to write great poetry as to become an accomplished fly-fisher.

For the moment, however, we are considering only how to find the fish, and to do it you must ask yourself what sort of a position you would take up if you were a lusty trout bent on picking up a good living with as little exertion as possible. To begin with you certainly would not station yourself permanently in the main body of the stream where the flow of the water is strongest, and the exertion required to "keep station" is the greatest; if you lived there it would be because you had not the strength to assert your right to a better place. It is true that now and again a good trout will, for some reason best known to himself, make an expedition into the middle of a heavy water. When he does he will tell you so by rising, and you can go for him. But he is only a chance visitor there, for it is not the best

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place from his point of view, and it is an infallible rule that the best places are held by the best fish. If you want them you must think out which those places are.

Now suppose there is a bit of a rock, or a clump of weed, making a comfortable little backwater with the stream running swiftly on each side of it. That is an ideal spot. The trout can lie at his ease in the backwater and keep an eye on the food coming down on either side of him. If there is a good trout in the river, be sure you will find him there. But don't throw into the backwater. He is not accustomed to seeing his meals served in that way. Throw into the stream just above the rock or the clump, and trust him to see your fly as it comes past. Seeing that this is what he is used to, you may be certain he is keeping a sharp look-out for flies that come by him in that fashion, and that his suspicions will not be aroused.

A deep pool scooped out by the eddies under a bank is always certain to hold good fish. So is a run between two stones or clumps of weed when the water is rising, for then the trout are not waiting for the food to come to them, but are on the move

looking for it in all the likely places. In hot, bright weather they are very fond of lying in the shade of overhanging boughs, and if you can put a fly neatly into such a spot, you will often get a good fish when the water is so low and clear that fishing elsewhere is rather discouraging. In the same kind of weather there will always be two or three sunning themselves in the shallow water at the tail of a pool. But to come over them with any hope of a rise requires a longish cast, for, as they are close to the surface of the water, they can see the angler a good way off, and will be away into the deep water above at the first alarm.

When the wind is across the stream fish close to the leeward bank. The flies are naturally blown in that direction, and the trout are perfectly well aware of the fact. If you can manage, without getting hung up, to pitch your fly on to the bank itself and allow the force of the stream, acting on your line, to sweep it unostentatiously into the water, you will nearly always get a rise if there is a trout in the neighbourhood. But it is not an easy thing to do without getting into trouble, and it is

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necessary to prospect carefully for a suitable spot. Here and there you will see in the eddies and the tiny backwaters patches of the foam which the country people call "beggar's balm." These are always worth a trial, for the flies become entangled in them and the trout are on the alert for these mishaps.

Up to the time of the annual feast of the May Fly the trout tend to frequent slack and shallowish waters and to avoid the heavier streams. Afterwards, being much stronger, they seek them when they are roaming about in search of food. But the beginning and end of the whole matter is, as I have said, to imagine yourself a trout and ask yourself where, in the particular circumstances of water, weather, and time of year, you would be most likely to take up your position in order to get the most food with the least amount of trouble and danger. Success in fly-fishing depends more upon giving an intelligent answer to that question than upon anything else. Study the water as carefully as a General studies the ground on which he means to fight, and be always on the look-out for every hint that trout give you as to where

they are, what they are feeding on, and how, at the moment, they like the dish served. The only absolute rule is to observe closely and constantly, and then to draw intelligent conclusions.

CHAPTER V

WHEN TO FISH

THE maxim of a Scottish ancient was : “ Aye gang to the watter when the fush are hungry,” but I don’t know that it helps us very much, for nobody on earth knows what makes the trout rise, a thing which, according to Charles Kingsley, is not to be told till the coming of the cocqcigrues. Nevertheless, if—and it is a big “ if ”—you are one of the lucky people who can pick their own days, there are a few general rules which may be of some service.

There is almost invariably a rise beginning about six in the morning and lasting for about four hours. There is also another which begins in the late afternoon and lasts until after dark. These are usually, but by no means invariably, the best of the day, and during these hours you may expect to get the major part of your take. But there are besides many subsidiary rises,

lasting for half an hour or so, and these it is never safe to neglect.

Some people pay a great deal of attention to the weather, and will not fish on one day because it is too dark and cold, and on another because it is too bright and hot. As a matter of fact there is no rule whatever. A little colour in the water is a great help, but, broadly speaking, I think the weather makes very little difference. I have had wretchedly poor days when the weather seemed ideal and very good ones when it was, to all appearances, about as discouraging as it could be. As for the wind, the only wind which is worth a button is the one which blows up-stream, and, if you get that, the point of the compass from which it comes is of no consequence.

You will not get trout with the fly in a heavy flood. When the water is the colour of pea-soup the fish are not troubling about what is happening on the surface, but are fully occupied with the food brought down by the spate. Nor can you expect to do much the day after a flood, for then they are gorged and inert. Also they seem to know in some mysterious way that a flood is coming some hours before the thick clouds

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begin to gather, and are apt to cease rising and await for the feast that they know is on the way. Yet, so uncertain are they even in this that I have known them rise freely in the middle of a heavy thunderstorm with the rain coming down in bucketfuls. In fact the only rule which I have never seen broken is that they will not rise when there is a fog on the surface of the water. In any other weather whatever there is always some hope.

At some period during almost every day of the season, there is what is called "the time of the take." It may not last for more than an hour, and when it will occur is quite uncertain, except that it is generally before noon. During that hour, or less, every trout in the stream will be feeding like an alderman. It is then for you to make hay while the sun shines.

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